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House of Representatives

FRIENDSHIP WITH PHILIPPINES LIES IN FILIPINO VETERANS EQUITY ACT!

HON. BOB FILNER

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

MR. FILNER: Mr. Speaker, when bipartisanship reigns in this body, we do good things. We can bring the bill of the gentleman from California (Mr. Lantos) to the floor. We have brought the motion of the gentleman from California (Mr. Rohrabacher) to the floor reaffirming our friendship with the Philippines. I thank the gentleman for doing that. He and I were the first Congresspeople, in fact, to go to the Philippines to greet the new President when she took over last February, and we gave the greetings of this whole Congress and our support for her. We reaffirm that support in this resolution today.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask this body, however, to take one concrete move towards reaffirming that relationship that goes beyond this resolution. This resolution is wonderful, and we will get support for it. But the gentleman from New York (Mr. Gilman) and I, supported by the gentleman from California (Mr. Rohrabacher) and others in this room, have tried to get to the floor of this House the Filipino Veterans Equity Act, a bill which would truly reaffirm our friendship with the Philippines.

More than 50 years ago, which this resolution talks about, 55 years ago Filipino soldiers were drafted into the United States Army by the President, President Roosevelt. They served well. In fact, we were able to hold up the Japanese advance through the efforts of the Philippine Army, under the direction of Douglas MacArthur.

We were able to hold up the Japanese advance, throw off their timetable and that helped us win the war in the Pacific. But how does this Congress react to thank the Filipino soldiers? We passed a law in 1946 to withdraw all the benefits that they were entitled to as veterans of the United States Army.

Mr. Speaker, they were drafted into the Army. They fought honorably. They died in great numbers. They were with us through the whole war, the Bataan Death March, the Battle of Corregidor, and yet what did we do? We withdrew their benefits.

It is 55 years later. Many of these brave soldiers are in their late 70's and early 80's. They are not going to be with us much longer. The best way we can reaffirm our ties to the Filipinos is to pass the equity act that has been sponsored by the gentleman from New York (Mr. Gilman). This would say to the Filipino veterans, you were veterans, you have the honor and dignity that comes with that, so let us truly reaffirm our friendship and pass the Filipino Veterans Equity Act.

I do thank the gentleman for his motion. The Burnhams are being held. We have to get them released. We have to help President Arroyo in her efforts to stamp out terrorism in her nation.

Salamat, my colleague. And I say to our friendship, mabuhay!